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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000627

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS, EAP/K

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [VM](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)

SUBJECT: VIETNAM AND DPRK WORK TO IMPROVE TIES

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Classified By: Ambassador Michael W. Marine per 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary and Comment

1. (C) DPRK MFA Asia Director Ma Chol-su visited Vietnam March 2-5 as part of the two countries' continuing efforts to patch up relations following the mass defection incident of July 2004. During meetings in Hanoi with Government and Party representatives, the two sides agreed to pursue high-level visits, including by the DPRK Foreign Minister later in 2005. The DPRK representative requested food and other assistance, criticized the United States in the context of the Six Party Talks and "positively evaluated" Vietnam's reform efforts. For their part, the Vietnamese interlocutors urged the DPRK and other parties to resolve peacefully the nuclear issue and promised to consider the DPRK's assistance request. Reportedly, neither side raised the matter of North Korean asylum seekers in Vietnam. Although Vietnam and North Korea appear to have more or less patched up their relations, Vietnam's relationship with the ROK still dwarfs its ties with its "traditional friend." End Summary and Comment.

2. (C) On March 16, ROK Embassy Political First Secretary Lee Kang-kuk provided Pol/C with the briefing he received from the Vietnamese MFA on the March 2-5 visit to Hanoi of DPRK MFA Asia Director General Ma Chol-su. Ma's primary interlocutor was MFA Asia 1 Director Nguyen Ba Cu, but he also met with Vice Foreign Minister Nguyen Phu Binh, Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) External Relations Commission Vice Chair Ta Minh Chau, MFA Economics Director General Doan Xung Hung, Diplomatic Service Bureau Chairman Nguyen Van Xuong and the Ministry of Trade's Asia Director General. Following his stop in Hanoi, Ma and his colleague (NFI) traveled to Laos, Indonesia and India.

Bilateral Relations

3. (C) The primary focus of Ma's visit was to "advance and normalize bilateral relations" and follow up VFM Binh's visit to Pyongyang in September 2005, the Vietnamese reported to the Korean Embassy. The Vietnamese invited DPRK Foreign Minister Paek Nam-sun to visit Vietnam this year, and DG Ma promised that the DPRK would provide its reply on the occasion of the ARF in Kuala Lumpur in July. During Ma's meeting at the CPV, Vice Chair Chau said that External Relations Commission Chairman Nguyen Van Son would like to visit Pyongyang in late April or early May, which DG Ma welcomed.

4. (C) The two sides also agreed to hold in Pyongyang sometime this year the sixth round of the Vietnam-DPRK

Economic Cooperation Committee. Each side's delegation would be led by a vice minister of trade. Furthermore, the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) plans to send a delegation to North Korea "in the near future." In terms of assistance, the DPRK representative requested that Vietnam provide North Korea with 20,000 tons of rice and 20 tons of rubber (as follow-on to the 1,000 tons of rice and five tons of rubber that Vietnam provided last year). The Vietnamese reportedly promised to think about it. The two sides also agreed to advance cultural and educational exchanges and to make repairs to each other's respective embassies.

#### Nuclear Issue, North-South Relations, Asylum Seekers

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15. (C) On the subject of the Six Party Talks, DG Ma said that they are "false talks" and that U.S. "financial sanctions" against North Korea violate the understanding reached in September 2005. The United States uses the issues of democracy and human rights to "pressure North Korea" and must change its policy. For their part, the GVN and CPV representatives expressed their hope that all parties would be able to resolve peacefully the issues before them. On North-South relations, DG Ma said that, through dialogue and economic cooperation, things are going well and that the DPRK intends to continue to pursue this course. Neither side raised the issue of North Korean asylum seekers in Vietnam.

#### "Internal Conditions," Third-Country Relations

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16. (C) The North Korean representative "positively evaluated" Vietnam's Doi Moi ("renovation") policy and its efforts to join the WTO and successfully host APEC. North Korea's own internal situation has improved, DG Ma reported, and the DPRK produced 5.45 million tons of food last year. Nonetheless, there is still a shortfall, and, although the DPRK will not

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seek assistance from international aid agencies, it would accept food and other aid from bilateral partners.

17. (C) Finally, DG Ma said that the DPRK's relations with China and Russia are proceeding smoothly on the basis of friendship and cooperation. Japan, on the other hand, continues its "single-minded insistence" on addressing the abduction issue, and there has been no progress in the two sides' normalization talks.

#### Comment

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18. (C) Vietnam-DPRK relations appear to be more or less back on track following the cold spell generated by the July 2004 transfer (or, as the DPRK put it, "mass kidnapping") of some 450 asylum seekers from Ho Chi Minh City to Seoul. Nonetheless, Vietnam's economic, political and cultural ties with the ROK dwarf its relations with "traditional friend" North Korea, and for the foreseeable future, the bulk of Hanoi's outreach efforts will likely remain focused on Seoul rather than Pyongyang. End Comment.  
MARINE